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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR RAISES HAGUE CONVENTION ON CHILD
ABDUCTION AND TIP WITH MINISTER OF JUSTICE

Classified By: Ambassador Kathleen Stephens. Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On December 16, Ambassador Stephens and Consul General Cynthia Sharpe met with Minister of Justice Lee Gwi-nam to press for Korea to accede to the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Parental Child Abduction and to continue to fight human trafficking in Korea and abroad. The Ambassador noted that next year is the tenth anniversary of the 2000 UN Protocol on Trafficking in Persons (UN TIP Protocol) and said that Korea's ratification would send an important signal to the international community. Lee said the Ministry of Justice was reviewing both Hague and the UN TIP Protocol, and Ambassador Stephens emphasized that the U.S. and Korea should to continue to cooperate closely on both issues. END SUMMARY.

Rule of Law

¶2. (C) The Ambassador began her December 16 meeting with Minister of Justice Lee Kwi-nam by complimenting Korea's rapid progress in short decades with respect to rule of law and protection of human rights. Lee chuckled and thanked the Ambassador for saying that Koreans respected the rule of law, indicating he thought Korea had more progress to make. Since taking office, Lee has strongly opposed "illegal" strikes and joined Labor Minister Yim Tae-hee in condemning the recent railway workers strike. (Comment: Ironically, Lee Kwi-nam assumed the office of the Minister of Justice in September despite his admission of and apology for registering a false address so his son could attend a prestigious high school -- a common practice among the elite in Korea. End Comment.)

Hague Accession

¶3. (C) The Ambassador noted that all G-8 countries except Japan as well as the majority of G-20 countries are members of the Hague Convention on International Child Abductions. The issue has been in the spotlight again, the Ambassador said, because of high profile child abduction cases in Japan. She told Lee that the Embassy was eager to assist and support the ROKG as it moved closer to accession. Referring to his talking points, Lee said that the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) was looking into joining the convention and was willing to cooperate closely with the Embassy. MOJ International Legal Affairs Division Director Lee Sang-yong, who was also present, noted that his office had already started discussing this issue with U.S. Embassy officials. Consul General Sharpe said that she understood that the ROKG had indicated it agreed in principle to joining the Hague convention.

Trafficking in Persons

¶4. (C) Ambassador Stephens observed that as Korea became more globalized so did its challenges in regards to human trafficking. The Ambassador said she hoped to continue our excellent cooperation with Seoul to maintain the ROK's excellent track record on combating trafficking in persons (TIP). Lee said that Korea had made progress in fighting trafficking domestically but recognized that the government needed to cooperate more closely with the international community to address transnational aspects of the problem. Ambassador Stephens said that because next year is the tenth anniversary of the UN Protocol on Trafficking in Persons, Korea's ratification would send an important signal about the government's commitment to anti-TIP efforts. Lee noted recent difficulties in the National Assembly, but said he understood the need for ratification.

Legal Cooperation and Exchange

¶5. (C) Lee thanked Ambassador Stephens for her efforts to implement the Visa Waiver Program (VWP). The Ambassador noted that, despite the global economic downturn and the unfavorable exchange rate, about 230,000 Koreans had made use of the VWP since its inception. She noted that there was still a need for the U.S. and Korea to work more closely together on legal issues -- like sharing criminal records -- but said that overall cooperation has been very good.

¶6. (C) Lee commented on how close the current U.S.-Korea relationship is and said that a strong U.S.-Japan relationship is also crucial to Northeast Asian security. Expressing her confidence in the prospects for U.S.-Japan relations, the Ambassador said that good Korea-Japan relations were also essential. In response to her question about legal cooperation between the two countries, Lee said Korea and Japan had close legal ties because their systems were so similar and because many Korean prosecutors had studied law in Japan and vice versa. These days, however, Korea's legal system was becoming more like that of the U.S. because of the large number of Koreans who study there, Lee said. The Ambassador said that she hoped the U.S. and Korea continued the successful judicial exchange programs that had benefited legal professionals in both countries.

STEPHENS